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ABSTRACT

This Bulletin is about sweeping changes that were put into effect at Roosevelt Junior High School in Eugene. It outlines some of the philosophy and ideas which generated these changes, explains how the new program was initiated, traces the development of the program through its first 3-year experimental period, and presents some major points brought out in the program's evaluation. (Photographs may reproduce poorly.) (Author)

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Oregon School Study Council BULLETIN

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THE ROOSEVELT PROGRAM:
Changing Patterns in Education at Roosevelt Junior High School

by

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School District 4J, Eugene, Oregon

Oregon School Study Council
College of Education
University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon

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in conjunction with the

Field Training and Service Bureau
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INTRODUCTION

The history of public education in America could be written in terms of change--of once new ideas which become the accepted way of doing things. We are an ever-changing society; public education must continually reflect society's changes if it is to serve us well. Experimentation and evaluation must continue in the processes of public education.

This Bulletin is about sweeping changes which were put into effect at Roosevelt Junior High School in Eugene. It outlines some of the philosophy and ideas which generated these changes, explains how the new program was initiated, traces the development of the program through its first three-year experimental period, and presents some major points brought out in the program's evaluation.

BACKGROUND

Roosevelt Junior High School is one of eight junior high schools in Eugene School District 4J. It is located in southeast Eugene (680 East 24th Avenue) in an older well-established section of the city not far from the University of Oregon campus. No detailed demographic information for the attendance area was available at the time of this writing; however, it is largely a middle and upper middle class area with some low-income families. The level of educational background of the adult patrons is probably higher than in most other areas in the district.

Total attendance of Roosevelt is slightly over 750. The entire school staff numbers about sixty, including forty classroom teachers. The principal is Donald Jackson and the vice-principal, N. Bradley Templeman.

Don Jackson, right; Brad Templeman, left

The New Program

The rationale and philosophy of the Roosevelt program began to develop more than five years ago. It grew out of staff discussions which centered around continual dissatisfaction with Roosevelt's standard junior high school program. Soon a number of students and parents were included in the discussions with staff members. During the planning stages, the staff learned in which areas of the program parents were least informed; staff members identified the parents' major misunderstandings and responded to them accordingly.

The staff arranged a series of meetings with parents. Every effort was made to get at least one parent from every school family to participate. These meetings were kept small to facilitate two-way communication. (At this time, the principal of Roosevelt was David Mortimore and Donald Jackson, the present principal, was vice-principal.)

For an idea of the kind of thought centered in these discussions, following is a quotation from a paper about the Roosevelt Program written by Raymond Scofield, a social studies teacher at the school:

> . . . too often, schools are operated for the convenience or benefit of teachers, principals, janitors, secretaries, and even architects who may have the power to initiate and perpetrate their own policies; even those which are essentially anti-intellectual as well as anti-kid.

People at Roosevelt were beginning to re-evaluate their own ideas of what schools should be doing for young people today.

The discussions considered topics such as the trend toward greater depersonalization in our mass society, mobility of the population, the tremendous increase in the availability of information, and the effect of

today's mass media on learning and learning attitudes. The staff saw that public education systems today must be prepared for continuous and radical change, and must help today's student acquire and develop skills, attitudes, habits of mind, and the knowledge and understanding necessary to cope with change.

The Roosevelt group concluded that each of us, essentially, must learn for ourselves, and because of the rapid pace of change in the world, we must urgently develop skills in independent learning and decision-making. The group felt that the focus of education was shifting from teaching to learning--from emphasis on memory to emphasis on creativity, attitudes, and values . . . that as teaching and learning improve, students will be better prepared to work creatively in unfamiliar intellectual areas, evaluate information, and reach decisions.

With faculty members, students, and parents strongly believing in the above ideas, the Roosevelt program change appeared inevitable.

A proposal for the new program was drafted, and with the support of Director of Education Dr. Erwin Juilfs and Superintendent Dr. Millard Pond, activities began in earnest. Release time was given to the staff every week for work on the plan. After almost a year, the new Roosevelt Program was completely outlined and ready for presentation to the district's Board of Directors.

In July of 1969, the board approved the plan for a three-year experimental period. Detailed annual reports were expected; a complete evaluation would be submitted at the end of three years.

Beliefs, ideals, and expectations about people, students, and school functions were outlined by the Roosevelt staff in the following way:

We believe this about people and students:

. . . All people are different, have various backgrounds, and have constantly changing interests.

. . . All people need the ability to cope with change.

. . . People learn what they want to when they want to.

. . . What people expect of an individual influences his behavior.

. . . Each individual's perceptions of "reality" are real to him.

. . . Open fields of choice foster exploration, thus people find many thoughts open to them where choice is encouraged.

. . . All people have a need to feel successful. Every student has a need to feel successful in the task of accumulating knowledge and skills.

Therefore this school will meet the needs of individuals by:

. . . exploring effective teaching strategies.

. . . offering an exploratory curriculum.

. . . allowing for individualized learning.

. . . clearly defining behavior, knowledge, and skill expectations.

. . . providing for situations that promote growth in social responsibilities.

. . . providing for experiences in problem-solving.

. . . promoting inquiry.

. . . providing for experiences in decision-making.

. . . encouraging and respecting student choices.

Four goals emerged from this philosophy:

AGENCY . . . to help each student become his own agent, learn how to take charge of the development of his own potential, and understand that only he, in the long run, is responsible for his learning.

MOTIVATION . . . to help each student become personally involved in his learning--to be free to explore actively his own resources and those of the school and the larger environment.

CREATIVITY . . . to help each student develop enough confidence in himself and in others to be able to think imaginatively and openly explore ideas, values, and relationships.

SCHOLARSHIP . . . to help each student find true satisfaction in learning, and understand that the subject-matter skills acquired are not only useful in themselves, but are tools with which to meet situations and solve problems.

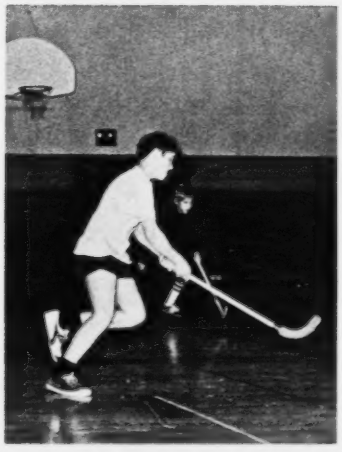
With the above philosophy and goals as a background, let's look now at some of the major details of the program.

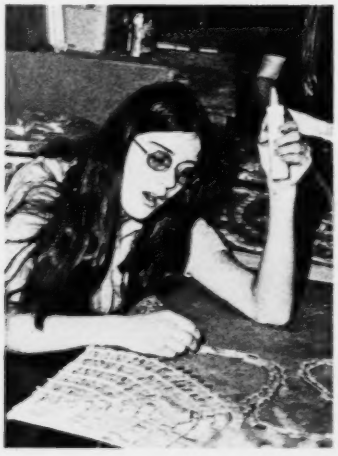
MAJOR ASPECTS OF THE NEW ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

The traditional semester is broken into terms of nine weeks each, called "quarters." The school day is divided into eight periods. Each staff member makes the determination as to which of his classes should be offered in the conventional pattern of one period every day, or for double time on alternate days. A system was devised to provide the necessary flexibility for scheduling both kinds of classes. Double time classes are scheduled alternately by labeling the first day of a quarter "A" day and the next, "B" day. The third day is an "A" day, the fourth a "B" day, and so on. A student might have a laboratory science class for two periods on an "A" day and an entirely different class those same periods on the alternate, or "B" day. His math class, however, would probably meet for one period every day.

A new catalog of high-interest course offerings was developed by the staff to fit the new nine-weeks quarter. The courses try to emphasize novel but meaningful ways to approach subject matter.

New high-interest courses were offered . . .





About 250 different courses are offered and available to any student--no matter what grade level--in a single school year. The whole program, with very few exceptions, consists of elective courses, and as a result, traditional grade levels--seventh, eighth, and ninth--are nonexistent.

Before the program began, there were dire predictions that students would take advantage of the "new freedom"--for example, "major" in P.E. while ignoring English and social studies. However, all data show that Roosevelt students are taking, on the average, more English and social studies than was ever possible under the traditional system.

In some ways, Roosevelt Junior High has become an educational supermarket in which a student is free to shop. He can sample, and he can reject. Occasionally a student satiates himself with one subject before

moving on. At other times he browses. Sometimes he is unable to get the course he wants because others get there first. Often he chooses because he needs help in one of his weak subjects; at other times because he enjoys a subject. Friends and relatives may influence his choices. No subjects, as we have said, are reserved for certain grade levels and only a few are restricted because of gender or experience.

"Risk" is involved when choices are made, but the Roosevelt staff points out that their elective system really isn't any more risky than the school which sends a student through an assembly line where he is stuffed with things "known" to be "good" for him, (even though "good" varies from school to school). Neither system, they point out, can claim the ability to look at a student and predict what he will need at a given point in the future. At least Roosevelt places him in an active role of finding alternatives, weighing them, and making decisions . . . right or wrong.

Roosevelt students are learning to become their own agents for obtaining a suitable course of study, not only in the registration lines but in the thinking and decision-making which precede registration. Every nine weeks, before the actual registration process begins, a student, working from the school catalog, draws up his proposed schedule. This schedule must be signed by his parents and approved by his House Advisor. (A description of the "House" system and the role of the House Advisor will follow.) The actual registration process, too, is a learning experience. Students register for their chosen classes competitively, shifting to alternate choices when necessary if the first choice is closed.

The elective program forces teachers to continually strive to do their best in making their offerings interesting and rewarding for the student. With this completely elective system, it soon becomes clear which teachers are failing to present things in an engaging and meaningful way.

No grades are given at Roosevelt; no attempt is made to rank students against each other. After each nine-week period, a student receives a written report describing his academic and behavioral performance in each course he has taken. These reports indicate "credit" or "incomplete" for each course. Not all of the written evaluations are comprehensive documents of individual student performance. However, even the weakest written reports usually contain at least a description of course work done, and to that degree, are superior to an unqualified letter grade. Graduation from Roosevelt is determined by evaluation made by the student's advisor and by other staff members.

There were several reasons for making this change in the grading system. The basic reason was that traditional letter grades are, to a large extent, the main goal for many students while the actual learning experience is secondary. The Roosevelt staff feel that a single letter grade which represents simply an average of the student's work for a term seldom gives a true profile of the student's performance. The whole idea of having all-elective, nongraded courses is to encourage a student to experiment in various disciplines. With the fear of failing or receiving a negative letter grade, the student is hardly in a position to try new things.

The stigma of remedial classes vanished along with the removal of grade level barriers. Students are now more willing to sign up for courses

which offer help in specific skills. Such courses used to be called "bonehead classes," and no upperclassman would willingly enroll in them. Now, however, students from all three grade levels who are poor spellers, for example, often eagerly compete to get into a class which promises help. This change in attitude alone probably justifies the Roosevelt Program.

The Roosevelt system of student performance evaluation tends to promote an ongoing process between the student and teacher which continues throughout the school year. Students favor the present evaluation program, and nearly all of the Roosevelt teachers strongly favor the written evaluation even though it demands much more teacher time to prepare. (When the faculty was polled, only one teacher indicated that he preferred letter grades.)

The House System

One of the most important aspects of the Roosevelt Program is the House. Each teacher advises a group of no more than twenty randomly selected students known as his House. In many ways it is the heart of the program; it is here that a student can receive the help necessary to learn to make responsible decisions in the development of his own potential.

An excellent description of the House and the role of the House Advisor appears in Raymond Scofield's paper quoted earlier:

> . . . In its most limited form, House, which meets 30 minutes daily, might resemble a homeroom, complete with daily announcements and attendance reports. But in a broader sense, House is the core of the Roosevelt Program, for it is in House that the student gains an understanding of the goals of the program and begins to assess himself in relation to them. The most important aspect of House is the relationship that develops between members (the advisor is also a member), who may have had no reason even to know one another if it had not been for House. A House that functions well develops individual confidence as well as group loyalty.
>
> Being a House advisor is a little like being a combination of father confessor, favorite uncle, ombudsman, devil's advocate, and computer. Obviously most teachers will not be able to serve well in all of these categories, but it is not unusual for advisees to fill in the weak spots.

As "father confessor" the advisor offers low-key group and individual counseling to his House of twenty, and the twenty may give him a little counseling when he needs it. The principal at Roosevelt, Don Jackson, winces when he hears a fellow principal boast that his student:counselor ratio is down to 300:1. True, all teachers are not trained counselors, but all have certainly had some training and a wise advisor knows what to handle and what to refer. The "father confessor" also hears and responds to discussion about course work, class conflicts, attendance problems, and also serves as the main contact between home and school.

The "favorite uncle" part of the advisor often acts as social chairman in helping to plan a mountain climb, a trip to the beach, breakfast at someone's home, or a ball game. It is also the "favorite uncle" who can give a gentle scolding and get results.

As an ombudsman the advisor plays the role which is most fraught with danger. It usually means seeing a colleague about an act considered unfair by an advisee. Traditionally the student would growl and bear it, but at Roosevelt he may call in a third party--his advisor. Since every teacher is also a House advisor, he cannot afford to be as unyielding as he might have been in the past. Being an advisor helps remind every teacher that the students in his classes are human, not simply empty vessels to be filled.

As a devil's advocate the advisor works his hardest. It can be as simple as perversely challenging a course on an advisee's schedule, or as difficult as taking the unpopular side in a House argument. Often the clearest understanding of a problem results from an emotional session with the devil's advocate. It is also he who assists his advisees in discovering alternatives to problems and in developing their abilities to make purposeful decisions.

Finally, he serves as a human computer who stores all the information needed to advise honestly, including personal information and the content of the many different courses offered. With such a job description, it is understandable why two-thirds of the faculty declared on a poll that House was the single most important factor to the success of the Program--even when they were unsure of their personal effectiveness in House. A large majority of students verified the importance of House by announcing their satisfaction with the help they received there. As one former student put it, "House let me see how teachers are human and that learning is equally dependent upon the student."

Roosevelt has one professionally qualified counselor, who played an active role in getting the program going, and who sees the advisor system as a logical extension of the school's "guidance system." This counselor spends a considerable portion of time acting as a consultant and resource person for advisors who often feel that they are not as "wise" as Mr. Scofield would like to assume. The counselor in this way serves to strengthen the advisor-student relationship rather than to interfere with it.

One of the program's many positive side effects is the dramatic increase in parent involvement and interest in the school. This interest has remained exceptionally high, undoubtedly, because of several factors: in some people's minds the plan is still "controversial" and "experimental," and change engages people's attention. The fact that students are more interested in school and feel they have a real opportunity to set their own educational goals, causes them to discuss school and school problems with their parents which, in turn, keeps parents interested and involved. Further, because before each nine-week session parents must approve a student's proposed schedule, they themselves are brought directly into the system.

Roosevelt is especially fortunate in receiving volunteer help from parents. There are often more parents who want to be in the school doing things than there are jobs for them to do.

Student teachers and interns are also favored by the Roosevelt Program. In a traditional setting, a student teacher simply takes over a regular teacher's class and returns it to the regular teacher when the term is over.

However, at Roosevelt, the talented and industrious student teacher, with his supervisor's guidance, may offer his own class to students who are not "pre-owned" and therefore do not have to be returned to the regular teacher. Interns have the chance to regroup every quarter and profit from their successes of the previous term. That is often not possible if you have the same class four quarters--you may have to live all year with early mistakes. As one intern said, "It's like four years of experience--four chances to make good rather than one."

EVALUATION

A number of research studies have been undertaken to evaluate the Roosevelt Program. Following are major evaluations of the Roosevelt Program--which are available from the office of Dr. Charles Stephens, Coordinator of Research, School District 4J, 200 North Monroe, Eugene, Oregon.

In September of 1971, the Instruction Department of District 4J published a document entitled "Progress Report: The Roosevelt Program." It lists the results of eight study projects undertaken in the spring of 1971:

Project 1: Results of Iowa Test of Educational Development.

Project 2: Reactions of Sophomores at South Eugene High School--one year later.

Project 3: Registration Survey.

Project 4: Transfer Survey.

Project 5: Balance of Subject Areas Taken by Ninth Graders.

Project 6: Faculty Questionnaire.

Project 7: Attendance Data.

Project 8: Roosevelt Student Body Questionnaire.

During February of 1972, Dr. Albert G. Leep, Associate Professor of Education, College of Education, Ohio University, was employed by the district to observe the program. Dr. Leep's report objectively evaluates many aspects of the program and makes a number of recommendations for changes.

In May of 1972, Mr. Tom Roberts, working with the district's department of research, published a detailed study of the results of a survey of Roosevelt Junior High School parents.

In May of 1972, Dr. Stephens prepared an evaluation of the program and presented a summary of his findings, including a brief outline of the above-mentioned studies. Following is the entire summary:

> A variety of comments and bits of information are contained in this report and the supporting materials. Care must be taken in not placing undue emphasis on any single comment or item of information. The entire package must be viewed as a total. This report is designed to summarize the contents of the various evaluative studies that have been made of the Roosevelt Program over the last two years. The findings of a variety of investigations are listed below:
>
> 1. Results of the Roosevelt Parent Survey indicate that there is support from the Roosevelt community to continue the program. With 78 percent of Roosevelt parents responding to the questionnaire, 59 percent of the persons favored continuation of the program in its present form. Thirty percent favored continuation of the program but with some modification. Ten percent of the Roosevelt parents expressed a desire to return to a more traditional program.
>
>   a. Parents reported the greatest source of satisfaction in the program is the opportunity to choose the courses their children will take in junior high school, from the variety offered.
>
>   b. Of least satisfaction to parents is the lack of communication with House advisors.
>
>   c. Parents reported over two and one-half times the number of positive changes in their children's attitude or behavior than negative changes since attending Roosevelt.
>
> 2. Dr. Albert Leep, Associate Professor of Education at Ohio University, spent a week observing the Roosevelt Program. He submitted to the district his observations. Dr. Leep's report is positive in nature. However, he does offer a number of suggestions for further consideration. In his summary he states: "I would hope

that the Roosevelt Program would continue and that it remain in a state of ferment. The staff should continue to explore ways of dealing with all students' needs and remain open in its approach in this endeavor, realizing that it may require differing levels of supporting structure for different students."

3. Based on the Composite score of the Iowa Tests of Educational Development administered in grade nine, the history is for the students at Roosevelt to score above the average score for the district. However, the average score for Roosevelt is not necessarily above the average score for all schools in the district in every academic area.

4. The ninth grade Mathematics scores from the Iowa Tests of Educational Development follow the same pattern as those for the Composite score (see item 3).

5. The results of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test administered in 1971-72 to all junior high school students showed that the average scores for Roosevelt were above the district average, but not necessarily the highest in the district for each of the three grade levels.

6. A comparison of sophomore grade point average for students who attended Roosevelt and Spencer Butte* showed little, if any, difference between the two groups of students.

7. Based on a year-long study of seventh graders at Roosevelt and Spencer Butte, the following three findings were reported:

   a. The number of positive comments about the Roosevelt Program increased between October and May for a group of 16 seventh-grade students interviewed at four different times during the school year.

   b. Student attitude towards school between seventh-grade students at Roosevelt and Spencer Butte were compared on 14 different groups of questions. The major difference in attitude toward school involved a group of questions that focused on encouraging

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*Note: Spencer Butte Junior High School is another of District 4J's junior high schools. It is located in the same general part of Eugene as Roosevelt and its students go on into the same high school.

students to participate in deciding how classes will be conducted. The students from Roosevelt scored significantly higher on these questions than did the students from Spencer Butte.

c. Twelve comparisons were made between the mathematics achievement of the seventh-grade sample from Roosevelt and Spencer Butte. In general, the students at Roosevelt scored slightly higher than Spencer Butte students. However, only four of these differences were significant. This is of particular interest since instructional period at Roosevelt is 40 minutes in length as compared to 50 minutes at Spencer Butte.

8. An analysis of courses taken by ninth graders at the end of 10 quarters (two and one-half years) showed a wide range in the number of subjects in which students have enrolled. Such variability would be expected at Roosevelt since the program's philosophy encourages students, parents, and advisors to individualize student schedules on the basis of needs and interests. For purposes of comparison, however, the percentage of students who enrolled in the same number or more than the number of quarters formerly required in the traditional program is as follows:

English	71%	Physical Education	31%
Social Studies	64%	Science	75%
Mathematics	67%		

CONCLUSION

Seldom has a thoroughly innovative program emerged from an old building housing an existing staff and without major funding from an outside source! Why did it happen at Roosevelt? Because the climate was right. The staff was a well-organized group of talented people willing to make large commitments of time and energy toward positive change. The staff was encouraged by the principal to think in terms of what they believed needed to be done, and not to limit their thinking to what might be "allowable."

Any public school educator will recognize that it would be foolhardy to attempt to make the kinds of changes we have been describing, without first having secured good understanding and substantial support in the community and among the school's patrons. The Roosevelt staff worked diligently to this end.